

# STATEWIDE CRIME LAB AUDIT

**OBJECTIVE:** Texas, like most states, has long had an issue with crime lab capacity at the state, county and municipal levels. All have spent millions trying to eliminate backlogs, yet backlogs continue to grow and the entire justice system struggles as a result. The only way to get a better handle both on resources and existing capacity \_ to better leverage cases statewide \_ is to thoroughly review where labs stand, learn their processes and look for efficiencies. A \$4.5 million expenditure is a small price to pay if it allows Texas to more wisely spend millions going forward \_ in addition to relieving expensive bottlenecks in the justice system.

## HOUSTON'S EXPERIENCE:

- Large lab, with 200 staff that serves the state's largest police department and the Harris County DA's office
- **2014:** backlogs in all sections, more than 12,000 total, average turnaround time across sections of about 150 days. Some disciplines operated at turnaround times of more than 500 days
- **2019:** backlogs in three sections \_ latent prints, about 1,570, gun database, about 370, DNA, about 130. Average turnaround time across disciplines of between 30-45 days
- Flat budget for three years, increase in caseload of 30 percent since 2014 but reduced backlogs and turnaround times

### WHAT CHANGED:

- Used federal grant dollars (NIJ backlog reduction capacity enhancement grants) to improve process and capacity
- Used lean six sigma (LSS) methodologies to research and implement process improvements, this includes about \$750,000 for consultant services and conducting projects and about \$750,000 in staff labor to research and implement process change
- Projects have focused on forensic biology/DNA, procurement systems, CODIS, evidence handling, management dashboards for easy-to-use metrics so the entire company can use them to improve processes and management
- Created an LSS team, certified three staff as black belts and about six as green belts to continue process improvements throughout organization

## FOR TEXAS:

- Opportunity exists to look at the entire system and how it functions and lay the groundwork for better cooperation and load balancing between labs so state money is more wisely and strategically spent
- Following a thorough review, Texas will be able to better leverage and interplay what DPS MUST do and should do with what other labs can do in lieu of DPS so the entire system operates more efficiently.
- Texas is large enough that changes made here could impact the entire country

## TIMELINE:

- October 31, 2020: preliminary report
- October 1, 2021: final report